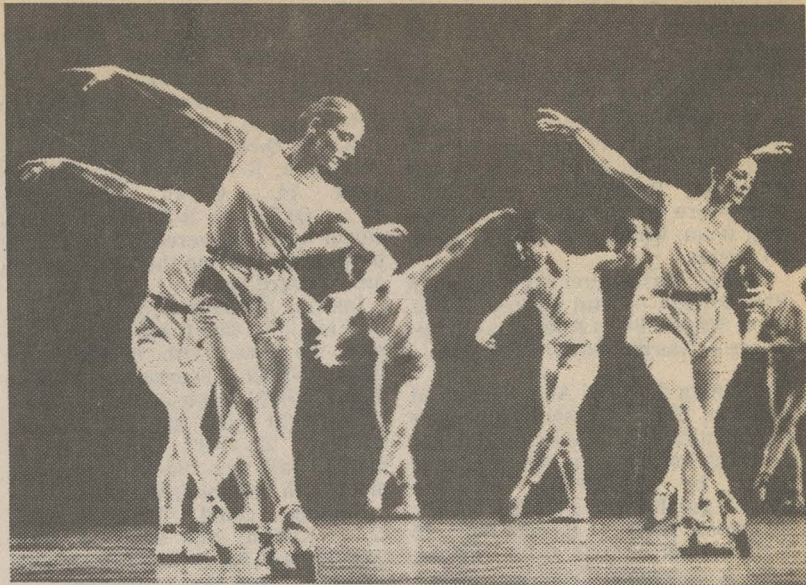


Dance: Mark Morris's 'Mort Subite'

THESE days it seems as if everyone wants a new dance by Mark Morris. The Boston Ballet has one. And it presented it on Sunday afternoon, in what turned out to be the highlight of its program at the PepsiCo "Summerfare" festival at the State University of New York at Purchase. "Mort Subite," the name of the dance, is said also to be the name of a cherry-flavored Belgian beer. Mr. Morris, a noted modern dance choreographer, has given much evidence of a wild and wicked sense of humor. And the nearly cherry-colored lighting of the backdrop suggested that inspiration. But "Mort Subite" is as dark, driving and elegiac as its score, Poulenc's Concerto in G minor for Organ, Strings and Timpani. It is a dance that summons up images of loss and a continuum.

The images are created, for the most part, through the device of setting the work around a block of four dancers who weave in and out of the piece, folding into the groups of dancers that move around them or frame them in slow-moving, sculptural friezes. The four are men. But dancers slip in and out, replacing one another in the group, until at the end the four are female. Flight is suggested by feet flying in low jumps and by poised, spread arms that occasionally remind one too much of similar ports de bras in Glen Tetley's "Voluntaries," set to the same score.

But for the most part the 16 men and women move through space with slightly bent knees and bodies that curve or hunch slightly down and into themselves, giving them a sometimes defeated, sometimes detached and almost casual look. They slack into the ground and ease into infrequent flight, pulsing through intricately woven patterns that eddy about the entire stage, allowing us to luxuriate with Mr. Morris in the Poulenc



Members of the Boston Ballet performing in Mark Morris's "Mort Subite."

music. His larger group works have grown more complex and more challenging to the eye, ear and mind over the years. "Mort Subite" continues that vein of provocative exploration, and promises to grow stronger as the dancers settle into Mr. Morris's difficult way with movement and impulse.

The Boston Ballet, founded in 1958 by E. Virginia Williams, had become a company in stagnation by the time of Miss Williams's death in 1984. It then went through a number of unsettled years. Bruce Marks became its director last year and is beginning to set his mark. But judging by Sunday's performance, Boston Ballet is a company in transition, searching for an identity.

Only Marie-Christine Mouis got the physical wit of George Balanchine's "Square Dance," a ballet set to music

by Corelli and Vivaldi and restaged here by Victoria Simon. Her partner, Devon Carney, brought an interesting look of disturbed surfaces to the male solo — Balanchine's contribution to the repertory of dances for troubled princes. But he seemed to be pushing himself through much of the demanding choreography.

The program was completed by Antony Tudor's "Jardin aux Lilas," staged for the company by Sallie Wilson. Elaine Bauer was persuasive as An Episode in His Past, the wistful, troubled older mistress. But Arthur Leeth, young Leslie Jonas and William Pizzuto offered pale interpretations of A Man She Must Marry, Caroline and Her Lover. There is a good deal of open sky in this set by Tom Lingwood, robbing the ballet of a certain necessary claustrophobic look and giving the dancers the odd but invigorating look of young athletes at large.

Jennifer Dunning

Rock Benefit Concert

A benefit concert featuring the rock groups General Public, Books of Love and Let's Active and the performers Suzanne Vega and Phranc, will be held tomorrow at 8 P.M. at the Felt Forum, Madison Square Garden, Seventh Avenue and 32d Street. Proceeds from the show will benefit Greenpeace, the environmental and antinuclear advocacy group. Tickets are \$22.50 (\$25 on day of the concert). Information: 947-5850 or 564-4400.

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